

## **A Passage from China: An Archival Study of the Correspondence and Friendship between E. M. Forster and Hsiao Ch'ien**

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### **Abstract**

The friendship between E. M. Forster (1879-1970) and Hsiao Ch'ien (1911-1999) dates back to 1941 when the two men first met at the Tagore Memorial Meeting in London. Forster and Hsiao soon developed a close friendship, and they engaged in frequent correspondence until 1949 when, prior to returning to Shanghai, China, from Hong Kong, Hsiao decided to call a halt to his correspondence with all his friends in the West, including Forster. The two men never met again after Hsiao left England in 1944.

This paper offers an archival study of the manuscript material of the correspondence between Forster and Hsiao from 1941 to 1944. Additionally, this paper also serves as a scholarly record of the literary friendship between Forster and Hsiao. To discern the nature of the friendship between Forster and Hsiao, and to probe the contents of their conversations, the author studies Forster's letters collected by Hsiao in his *Friendship Gazette* and the two surviving hand-written letters from Hsiao to Forster. Hsiao's autobiography, essays, Forster's biographies, fiction, non-fiction, and works by other writers are also consulted.

The most salient point emerged from this paper is the literary discussion between Forster and Hsiao, particularly concerning Forster's novel, *Maurice*, which deals openly with a taboo, homosexual subject matter. It transpires that their respective moral ideologies and attitudes toward male same-sex love are far from similar.

**Key Words:** E. M. Forster, Hsiao Ch'ien, 20th-century English Literature, Biography